

The Spanish-American War

THE SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR, which involved just five months of fighting between U.S. and Spanish forces, came in the aftermath of a prolonged Cuban and Puerto Rican struggle for independence. From 1868 to 1878 and then again beginning in 1895, Cuban independence fighters had waged their own war against Spain. Many historians believe that by the time the U.S. battleship *Maine* exploded in Havana Harbor, drawing the United States into the war,

Spain was ready to surrender to the Cubans. U.S. intervention changed the situation dramatically. As a result, although Cuba was granted its independence from Spain, the United States dominated Cuban affairs for the next 60 years. In addition, the victory over Spain allowed the United States to claim Puerto Rico as well as the Philippines, Guam, and the Wake Islands as U.S. territory.

BACKGROUND

1850

1854 U.S. ministers to Spain, France, and Britain issue the Ostend Manifesto, demanding that Spain sell Cuba to the U.S. and threatening an invasion if Spain refuses. In the wake of international outrage, the U.S. drops the demand.

1860

1868-1878 Cubans revolt against Spanish rule and demand the abolition of slavery. Cuba and Spain sign the Treaty of Zanjón in 1878, under which political reforms and the abolition of slavery are promised.

1886 Slavery is abolished in Cuba.

1870

1895 In February Cuban rebels led by José Martí initiate another fight for independence. In May Martí is killed in an ambush. In November, Generals Máximo Gómez and Antonio Maceo begin leading a guerrilla campaign against the Spanish.

1896 In February Spanish General Valeriano Weyler replaces Martínez Campos as captain general; he declares martial law and a policy of "reconcentration," forcibly removing Cubans living in the countryside to towns and cities, where they are housed in barbed-wire compounds with improper food and sanitation facilities. In April the U.S. offers to mediate an end to the fighting. After rebel leader Antonio Maceo dies in an ambush in December, President Grover Cleveland renews the U.S. offer to mediate but warns that American patience is not unlimited.

1880

1897 On March 4, William McKinley is inaugurated as U.S. president; in August Spanish prime minister Antonio Cánovas del Castillo is assassinated. Two months later he is replaced by the more liberal Práxedes Mateo Sagasta, who begins seeking peace in Cuba. Nonetheless, in December President McKinley condemns the policy of reconcentration in Cuba and hints at the likelihood of U.S. military intervention.

1890

1898 In January rebels riot in Havana, demanding complete independence from Spain as well as reforms. McKinley sends USS *Maine* to Cuba on a "courtesy visit" as a further warning to Spain. The next month, the *New York Journal* publishes a letter written by Enrique Dupuy de Lôme, the Spanish foreign minister to the U.S., in which he insults McKinley. De Lôme is immediately forced to resign. Shortly thereafter, the U.S.S. *Maine* explodes in Havana Harbor. Approximately 260 crew members out of 350 lose their lives. U.S. newspapers blame the Spanish, although many historians suspect an accident. In April the U.S. Congress passes three resolutions: first, recognizing Cuba's independence; second, ordering Spain to withdraw; and third, authorizing the deployment of U.S. armed forces. Spain severs diplomatic relations with the U.S.

1900



Theodore Roosevelt and the Rough Riders

A SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR TIMELINE

1898

April 22, 1898 Admiral William T. Sampson embarks from Key West, FL, with orders to blockade Cuban ports.

April 24 The United States declares war on Spain.

May 1 The U.S. fleet destroys Spanish forces in the Philippines in Manila Bay.

June 14 A U.S. military force of 17,000 sets sail from Tampa, FL, to Cuba, under the command of General William R. Shafter and Admiral William T. Sampson.

June 20 U.S. forces arrive in Cuba and meet with General Calixto García, the local Cuban rebel leader. García recommends that U.S. troops come ashore at Daiquirí and Siboney.

June 22 American troops land at Daiquirí and Siboney, join Cuban troops, and attack the Spanish outside Santiago.

July 1 The Spanish outposts at Las Guásimas, El Caney, Kettle Hill, and San Juan Hill are taken by American forces.

July 3 Spanish Admiral Pasqual Cervera y Topete, refusing to surrender to the U.S., tries to escape by sea but is destroyed along with his fleet.

July 17 The city of Santiago formally surrenders to U.S. forces.

July 25 Major General Nelson A. Miles lands with his force at Guánica Harbor in Puerto Rico, thus beginning U.S. occupation of the island.

July 28 Puerto Rico formally surrenders to Major General Miles's forces at Ponce.

December 10 Spain and the U.S. sign a peace treaty in Paris. The terms include the cession of the Philippine Islands, Puerto Rico, Guam, and Wake Island to the U.S. in exchange for \$20 million and the granting of full independence to Cuba. The Cuban rebels are not consulted.

1899

January 1, 1899 Spanish army officially withdraws from Cuba, and the U.S. military occupation of Cuba formally begins.

February 6 The U.S. Senate ratifies the Treaty of Paris.

March 19 The Queen Regent of Spain ratifies the Treaty of Paris.

April 11 The United States and Spain exchange ratifications, formally ending the Spanish-American War.

NAME: _____

DATE: _____

American Imperialism in 1898

Greene, Theodore P.

1. Why does the author question America's existence as a civilization?
2. How did America's actions during this time diverge from previous American traditions?
3. Why was there a great debate over annexation of the Philippines and who was debating this issue?
4. Why did America's relationship with Spain change in 1898?
5. Why does the author question America's declaration of war against Spain?
6. What chain of events led to America's annexation of the Philippines?
7. How did Hobson view imperialism?

INTRODUCTION

THE Spanish-American War of 1898 and our subsequent annexation of the Philippines can no longer be viewed simply as quaint instances of American exuberance in the "gay" 1890's. Both the war and the act of expansion to which it led involved issues which have become primary concerns for twentieth-century Americans. The whole episode marked our emergence upon the international scene as one of the great powers. How well we understand the responsibilities of this comparatively new role may determine the very existence of American civilization.

The annexation of the Philippines which followed our defeat of Spain in the war brought a sharp divergence from previous American traditions. For the first time in our long history of territorial expansion we stepped beyond our continental limits to seize lands which lay much closer to the peoples of Asia than to our own shores. In every way the acquisition of these islands posed new problems for American civilization. Strategically we committed ourselves to defense of a remote outpost in the Far East. Politically we undertook to rule over millions of people who in all probability would never become full American citizens. Economically we hoped for promotion of our foreign trade through the aid of military force and political domination.

Here was one of the turning points in our history, and the debate from 1898 to 1900 over annexation of the Philippines

constituted one of the great debates of American history. In a world where other great powers were rapidly absorbing the undeveloped portions of the globe, was it not both the duty and the interest of the United States to annex the Philippines? Failure to do so would leave the islands open to seizure by another power which might treat the natives with far greater harshness and which might use the islands to the detriment of American trade and security. Anti-imperialists, on the other hand, asked whether a republic like the United States could afford to contradict its political and social traditions by assuming control over other peoples who were to be its subjects, not its citizens. Would not such a course endanger our basic institutions and weaken our philosophy of government? These were the central and the enduring questions which posed the dilemma for thoughtful citizens. By 1899 the Senate had reached its decision to annex the Philippines. The reelection of President McKinley in 1900 seemed to indicate that the American people had no strong desire to repudiate this venture in imperialism.

How to explain the basic forces which led the United States into war and into expansion forms the primary problem raised in this volume. The secondary question posed by these readings is whether the decision for annexation was in the best national interest.

On April 19, 1898, Congress passed a resolution authorizing President McKin-

ley to employ the armed forces of the United States to secure the independence of Cuba and the withdrawal of all Spanish control from that island. In addition, the Teller Amendment to this resolution disavowed any intention on the part of the United States to claim jurisdiction over Cuba once the Spaniards had been expelled. This Congressional action came as the climax to three years of agitation over the Cuban question. In 1895 the smoldering resentment of the Cubans at the harsh conditions of Spanish rule had burst forth into open rebellion. Guerrilla warfare, atrocities, concentration camps, and systematic destruction of property embittered the struggle on both sides. Many Americans sympathized with the Cuban desire for independence from an oppressive Old World empire. The United States government under both President Cleveland and President McKinley attempted through diplomatic channels to moderate and if possible to end the conflict while urging the Spaniards to grant some form of autonomy to Cuba. Despite continuing friction, relations between Spain and the United States had improved somewhat by the beginning of 1898 when two incidents occurred suddenly to inflame American passions against that country. The first of these was publication in a New York paper of the De Lôme letter, a private letter written by the Spanish Minister in the United States to a friend in Cuba in which the Minister described President McKinley as "weak and a bidder for the admiration of the crowd." Six days later a mysterious explosion sank the battleship *Maine* in the harbor of Havana killing 260 American officers and men. Historians generally agree that these two incidents precipitated the Congressional resolution which brought us into war with Spain.

These bare facts, however, scarcely seem a sufficient explanation for a declaration of war. This was not the first time there had been a rebellion in Cuba. From 1868 to 1878 the Cubans had engaged in a similar revolt against Spanish authority. During that conflict an incendiary incident had also occurred when Spanish officials seized on the high seas a ship flying the American flag and after a summary court martial executed fifty-three of its passengers and crew for aiding the rebels. Neither President Grant nor Congress asked for war at that time. As for the De Lôme letter, De Lôme resigned immediately upon publication of the letter. No government can be responsible for the private indiscretions of its diplomats, and Spain apologized promptly for her erring Minister. To this day no one knows the true cause for the explosion of the *Maine*. Spain had every reason to avoid instead of to promote such a catastrophe. She tendered her regrets to the United States and suggested that an impartial tribunal be appointed to investigate the explosion.

President McKinley sent his war message to Congress two days after Spain had declared the suspension of hostilities in Cuba and at a time when the able American Minister to Spain was advising the President that a satisfactory solution to the Cuban question could be peaceably achieved within a matter of months. Why the United States should have decided upon war under these circumstances obviously requires a more searching examination of basic forces and pressures within the nation.

It is no less puzzling to understand from the surface facts how a war to liberate the Cubans from Spanish imperialism could have been turned into an instrument for American imperialism in the Far East. The crucial connecting link, of

course, was Admiral Dewey's defeat of the Spanish fleet at Manila. Presumably this was a defensive measure taken to prevent the Spaniards from attacking our west coast. The truth is, though it may well have been unknown to Americans at that time, that the aged Spanish fleet at Manila was in too wretched a condition to attempt any forays across the Pacific. Assuming, however, that Dewey and the authorities in Washington believed the destruction of that crippled fleet necessary to American security, it is still not clear why Dewey did not sail away from Manila once he had destroyed the fleet. Why instead should he have requested an army of occupation for the Philippines, and why, above all, should President McKinley have authorized the dispatch of such an army within a few days of Dewey's victory?

From the moment of Dewey's victory in Manila Bay events and decisions seem to have pyramided upon one another in an almost irresistible fashion until the final decision for annexation of the Philippines was made. In his instructions to the American commissioners appointed to negotiate the peace treaty McKinley himself observed "the march of events rules and overrules human action." Were these simply a fortuitous series of accidents which led America into the path of imperialism, or were there identifiable influences and specific human agents guiding the nation's course? Many contemporaries were convinced that all this was a part of America's "manifest destiny," that an inscrutable Providence was at work extending the blessings of American civilization both into the Caribbean and the Pacific. Richard Hofstadter has commented, however, "... where contemporaries heard the voice of God we think we can discern the carnal larynx of Theodore Roosevelt." Other scholars would

substitute for Roosevelt's shrill tones as the directing voice in national affairs either the soft but weighty words of financiers and industrialists or the screaming headlines of a William Randolph Hearst.

Some writers trace both the decision for war and the decision for taking the Philippines to the same sources. Others find sharp differences between the major groups supporting each of these steps, with only a small minority group strongly interested in both actions. All of the first six authors in this collection, however they may differ, are primarily concerned with discovering the dominant factors at work in this turning point of our history.

Probably the most influential single study of imperialism was first published by J. A. Hobson, an English economist, over fifty years ago. From the 1938 edition of Hobson's classic work, *Imperialism, A Study*, the first reading selection is taken. Unlike most other authors in this volume, Hobson endeavors to survey the phenomenon of imperialism in all the leading countries of Europe at the close of the nineteenth century as well as in the United States. He finds a common "tap-root" for the widespread surge of imperialism in the desire of financiers and industrialists to secure profitable investments and markets for the rapidly accelerating accumulation of capital and consolidation of industry. His analysis deserves careful consideration not only for its own logic and insight but also for the influence which it has had. Drawing largely upon Hobson's ideas, writers like Hilferding and Lenin have extended the Marxist analysis of capitalism to conclude that imperialism is the final stage of capitalism which precedes and produces the eventual collapse of capitalist society. Both the foreign policy and the propaganda charges of Soviet Russia today are strongly influenced by premises taken from Lenin's *Imperialism:*

The Last Stage of Capitalism.

Greene, Theodore P. *American Imperialism in 1898.*

Boston: D.C. Heath & Co, 1955.

